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THE VALUE OF NATIONALISM IN ART

BY EDWARD KING

With original illustrations by Eastman Johnson.

EASTMAN JOHNSON always strikes the note which finds a responsive echo in the hearts of the masses. With what delight the throngs at the Philadelphia Exhibi-



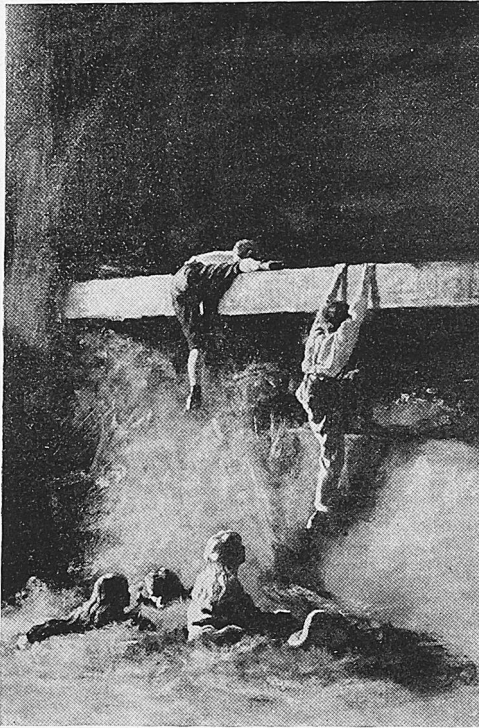
A STUDY

tion of 1876 turned from the dazzling collection of foreign genre pictures to feast their eyes upon the reproduction of some purely American scene—the old wooden house with its garden full of flowers, or the field with its homely fences. Here, at last, was something which solicited not only their admiration, but touched them with an infinite tenderness, bringing up a thousand memories of youth and home and of the dim past. And to pictures like this, from the easel of Eastman Johnson, they gave a reverent admiration which they could not bestow upon the gorgeous sunsets over Venetian campanile and dome, or on the delicate grays, the romantic tree-vistas, and the haunted glades of the Fontainebleau forest. There is a magic at the end of an artist's pencil when he portrays, in the right spirit, the scenes and the types of his native land.

And there are some artists, both in painting and in literature, whose conscience is so delicate, whose perception is so keen, that they resolutely adhere to the subjects afforded by their own country, because they know that in them they



THE SUGAR-CAMP

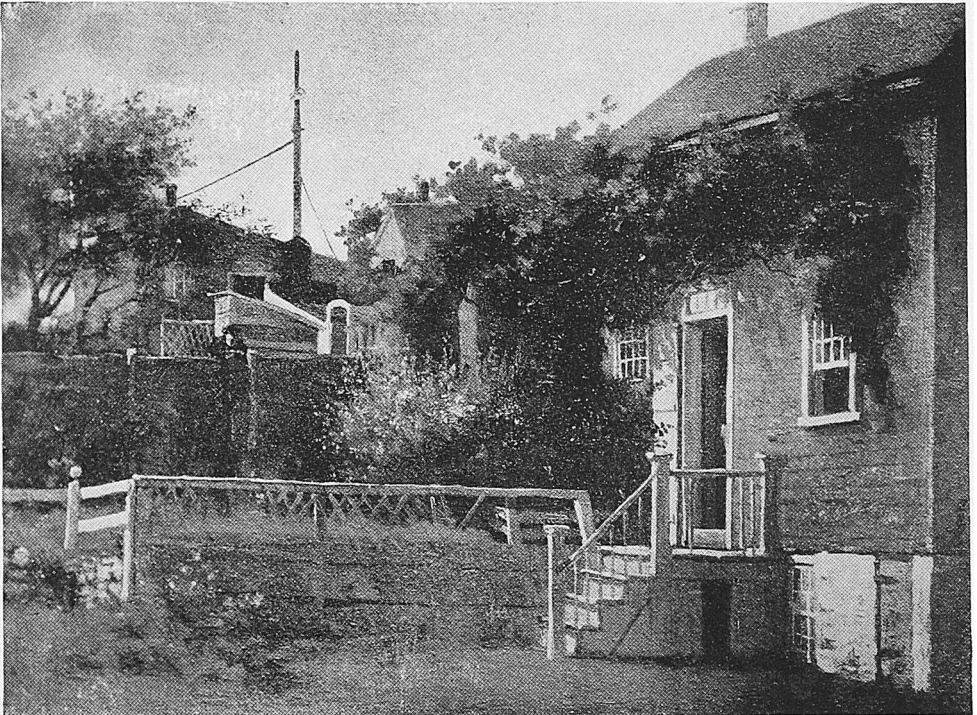


CHILDREN IN THE HAY-MOW

are at their best.

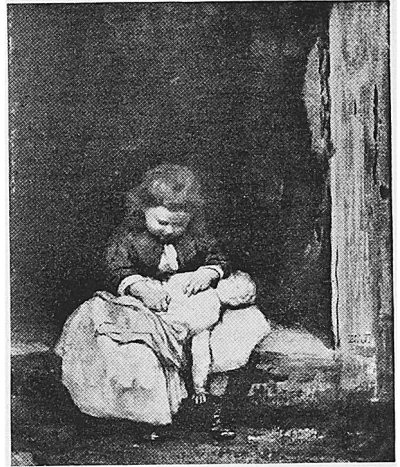
Tourguéneff, accomplished man of letters and real genius that he was, did not trust himself to portray the boulevards of Paris, or the rural seats around the French capital, where he spent the greater part of his mature years. But with what exquisite skill and wealth of detail he depicted the forests, the steppes, the snowy streets, or the flowery uplands of his native Russia. Happy the artist who does not bid for cosmopolitanism in his art; who is of his own land and his time, and who, if he make an excursion into foreign parts, does not attempt to conceal the fact that he is beyond his natural limits.

Perhaps we have been a little deficient in these latter years, in that proud assertion of nationality which is so marked a characteristic of European literature and art. But the neglect is transient, and will be amply remedied. Grateful though the shadow



A SKETCH AT NANTUCKET

which Europe throws athwart the New World may be, it cannot be allowed to lie there indefinitely. We must have the courage to admire the grace and charm which spring, exhaustless and appealing, all around us. Sunsets off the Maine coast, gorgeous effects of dawn over the Pacific wave-crests, the quaintness and dramatic force of episodes of American village life, must gradually come to have the same value in our eyes as similar transcripts of nature and life in France or Greece. The younger generation of painters has learned this lesson. I wish that as much might be said of the buyers of the hour. When will the Boston banker, the Chicago millionaire and the New York speculator give the preference to native subjects, and thus afford the American painter inestimable encouragement? When will a Moran find it more to his interest to paint the shimmering reaches of the lower Mississippi, with their picturesque boatmen, their magical effect of light reflected from the dazzling skies, than to lavish all his skill upon a gala day in Venice?



THE YOUNG MOTHER

Under the heartfelt nationalism which everybody can see and appreciate in Eastman Johnson's pictures, lies a sincere and laborious devotion to truth, born of love for the work. Here are no partial and imperfect impressions of things seen through a temperament, but the things themselves. What more real than the "Old Kentucky Home?" What more devoid of pretense, theatrical groupings or adventitious aid of any kind? Yet it has touched the hearts of millions. It is of that high art which lifts the masses to its level while they think it has stepped down to theirs.

The absence of affectation, the utter truthfulness, in the pictures of Nantucket life, are very impressive. The painter has made you see the scenes as they are.



A HUSKING-BEE AT NANTUCKET

In the "Husking Bee" how easy to have composed a group which should tell a sentimental story in connection with his rustic island-gathering of industrious folk! Yet that would have been to intrude the theatre upon a thing as remote from it, as foreign to it, as are the Egyptian Pyramids. The picture is like one of George Sand's descriptions, with a wealth of detail which challenges admiration and testifies to consummate skill as well as to a prodigious faculty of observation. No story is lugged in. We are allowed to look in upon real beings, untouched by self-consciousness.

Full of truth also, is the group of old sea-dogs in their battered tall hats, seated around the stove in the cobbler's little room, rehearsing their whaling-voyages and their battles with the great deep, and drawing many lessons from the stories of their own eventful lives.

Why is this art, which so scorns amusement, which shirks no sordid detail, so interesting? Is it because it is so true? Faithful reproduction of life and nature, miraculously preserves the glow of the one and the grace of the other for the contemplation of future generations. What is the secret of the process? Not even the artist himself can tell.



THE OLDEST INHABITANT



THE NANTUCKET SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY